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TAGS: PREL IZ TU

SUBJECT: FM ZEBARI WELCOMES IDEA OF A SYG-DESIGNATED SENIOR OFFICIAL TO INVESTIGATE 8/19 BOMBINGS

REF: STATE 94944

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Gary A. Grappo, for reasons 1.4 b and d.

¶1. (S) Summary: Iraqi FM Zebari welcomed the proposal contained in reftel points that the SYG designate a senior official to help examine foreign support or involvement in the August 19 bombings and other acts of terrorism and interference in Iraq's internal affairs. Spinning the proposal in his direction, Zebari said the idea of a fact-finding team "or an envoy" would be a very positive step. Zebari said that in his September 9 meeting in Cairo with Syrian FM Mu'allim in Cairo, the two sides agreed to some basic confidence building measures -- despite the GOI appeal to the UN, which would not be withdrawn -- as a way to begin de-escalating the crisis and noted that security officers from the two sides were to meet with Turkish counterparts in Ankara September 14. Other points in the meeting will be reported septel. End Summary.

ZEBARI SEES USG PROPOSAL AS POSITIVE STEP

¶2. (S) Pol M/C September 14 delivered (reftel) points to Iraqi FM Hoshyar Zebari, underscoring that the USG wanted to work closely with the GOI and that a UNSYG-designated senior official would likely be a more expeditious way to get action quickly. Zebari welcomed the proposal. He said PM Maliki's letter to the UNSYG was meant to inform the UNSC of the dimensions of the problem and that the GOI recognizes that a number of preliminary steps are necessary before there would be any decision on a formal investigative commission or tribunal. "So a fact-finding team or an envoy is an acceptable way to go," said the FM. "We accept it as a way forward." Pol M/C explained that he would convey that GOI response back to Washington. In answer to the FM's question, Pol M/C said that it was not necessary at this point for the GOI to go back to the UNSYG.

QUESTIONS ABOUT "SENIOR OFFICIAL"

¶3. (S) At a later point in the conversation, senior policy advisor Farid Yassen asked Pol M/C if we had any sense of the type of candidates who might be considered for the job, whether investigators or diplomats. Pol M/C responded that it was premature to speculate. DFM Abbawi questioned whether this approach was meant to preclude a UN-led investigation. FM Zebari short-circuited the inquiry, noting that the Iraqi side was aware that there needed to be sequencing in any move toward more advanced steps, such as a tribunal, and that the way forward proposed by Pol M/C was an acceptable way to start the process.

¶4. (C) Zebari gently criticized the U.S. for putting out a position on the August 19 attacks that undercut the GOI

position. He stated that several of his Arab counterparts with whom he had spoken at the AL gathering in Cairo reported to him that the USG was putting out the word that the GOI's position implicating Iraqi Baathists in the August 19 bombings was not credible. "You are not helping us," he said. The FM clarified that the GOI had made clear from the outset that it believed al-Qaeda to be heavily involved in the bombings, but insisted that that did not preclude Iraqi Baathist involvement. He said, "speaking as a friend," that the U.S. had weakened the Iraqi position.

CONFLICT INSIDE GOI ABOUT RESORT TO UN

¶15. (C) The FM acknowledged that there had been conflict inside the GOI over the decision to seek UN involvement. In his view, the Presidency Council statement of September 8, which view, the Presidency Council statement of September 8, criticizing the move, was a product of long-simmering disagreements between the PM's office and the Council about when the PM needed to consult them before taking action. It was also possibly influenced to a degree by Iranian intervention, he indicated, pointing to the strong likelihood that Iranian Qods Force Commander General Qasim Suleimani had visited Suleimaniya days prior to the statement. Zebari hinted that Suleimani had met with President Talabani and pressured the GOI to back off its key ally, Syria. Zebari emphasized that the GOI decision to resort to the UN reflected a "unanimous" decision of the Cabinet.

MEETING IN CAIRO AND TURKISH MEDIATION

¶16. (C) Zebari said he met in Cairo September 9 on the margins of the Arab League Ministerial with Syrian FM

Mu'allim, Turkish FM Davutoglu, and Arab League SYG Amre Moussa. He described the atmosphere as positive, noting that he has had long-standing good relations with the Syrian FM, which helped. He made clear that the GOI was "not accusing Syria of direct complicity" but of providing haven for the Iraqi Baathists who had helped plan the attacks. He had conveyed to Mu'allim the importance the GOI placed on the SARG taking action to turn these Baathists over to Interpol if it did not want to send them to Baghdad. He had also noted that while the GOI wanted to de-escalate the crisis, and was taking steps to do so, the ambassadors could not return until the Syrians had taken some action; otherwise, the GOI would be admitting fault. Nonetheless, Zebari said he made clear in his meeting with Mu'allim that the GOI intended to continue moving forward with its appeal to the UNSC for action, a point of view that did not make Mu'allim happy. The FM informed Pol M/C that the GOI was summoning P-5 ambassadors September 15 to brief them on latest developments in this regard.

¶17. (C) The two sides agreed to several confidence-building measures, including stopping media attacks and agreeing to a meeting between security chiefs September 14 in Turkey. A team of six Iraqi security officials had departed for Ankara the same morning. Zebari also explained that there was the possibility of a higher level meeting in Turkey. He noted that Turkish PM Erdogan was considering inviting Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to Istanbul for an iftar (breaking of the Ramadan fast) and it was possible a senior GOI official, either the PM or the President would be invited, to make it a "joint" iftar. Zebari had been asked if a senior GOI official would attend such a function and he had explained that he had been willing to meet with his counterpart in Cairo, so there was no per se bar on such senior-level meetings with the Syrians, as the two sides sought to defuse the crisis. The FM criticized the Turks for showing too much sympathy for the Syrian position -- and too much skepticism about the evidence Iraq had shared with Syria. Zebari had warned them that Iraq would only continue with the mediation if Ankara maintained a balanced position between the two sides.

¶8. (S) COMMENT: Zebari appeared genuinely pleased with our proposal, especially as defined by himself, e.g., "special envoy/fact-finder." He also understood the obstacles of moving forward with a formal, UNSC-backed investigation and tribunal. It was clear, however, that he does not want our approach to close off future, more severe UNSC actions. He agreed to await word from us regarding next steps but was nevertheless anxious to move forward, perhaps believing announcement of this UNSYG senior official will give him added leverage in his bilateral dealings with the Syrians.

HILL